

The Nazi Connection with Shambhala and Tibet

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Many high-ranking members of the Nazi regime, including Hitler, held convoluted occult beliefs. Prompted by those beliefs, the Germans sent an official expedition to Tibet between 1938 and 1939 at the invitation of the Tibetan Government to attend the Losar (New Year) celebrations.

Tibet had suffered a long history of Chinese attempts to annex it and British failure to prevent the aggression or to protect Tibet. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union was severely persecuting Buddhism, specifically the Tibetan form as practiced among the Mongols within its borders and in its satellite, the People's Republic of Mongolia (Outer Mongolia). In contrast, Japan was upholding Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Mongolia, which it had annexed as part of Manchukuo, its puppet state in Manchuria. Claiming that Japan was Shambhala, the Imperial Government was trying to win the support of the Mongols under its rule for an invasion of Outer Mongolia and Siberia to create a pan-Mongol confederation under Japanese protection.

The Tibetan Government was exploring the possibility of also gaining protection from Japan in the face of the unstable situation. Japan and Germany had signed an Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, declaring their mutual hostility toward the spread of international Communism. The invitation for the visit of an official delegation from Nazi Germany was extended in this context. In August 1939, shortly after the German expedition to Tibet, Hitler broke his pact with Japan and signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In September, the Soviets defeated the Japanese who had invaded Outer Mongolia in May. Subsequently, nothing ever materialized from the Japanese and German contacts with the Tibetan Government.

Several postwar writers on the Occult have asserted that Buddhism and the legend of Shambhala played a role in the German-Tibetan official contact. Let us examine the issue.

The Myths of Thule and Vril

The first element of Nazi occult beliefs was in the mythic land of Hyperborea-Thule. Just as Plato had cited the Egyptian legend of the sunken island of Atlantis, Herodotus mentioned the Egyptian legend of the continent of Hyperborea in the far north. When ice destroyed this ancient land, its people migrated south. Writing in 1679, the Swedish author Olaf Rudbeck identified the Atlanteans with the Hyperboreans and located the latter at the North Pole. According to several accounts, Hyperborea split into the islands of Thule and Ultima Thule, which some people identified with Iceland and Greenland.

The second ingredient was the idea of a hollow earth. At the end of the seventeenth century, the British astronomer Sir Edmund Halley first suggested that the earth was hollow, consisting of four concentric spheres. The hollow earth theory fired many people's imaginations, especially with the publication in 1864 of French novelist Jules Verne's *Voyage to the Center of the Earth*.

Soon, the concept of vril appeared. In 1871, British novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in *The Coming Race*, described a superior race, the Vril-ya, who lived beneath the earth and planned to conquer the world with vril, a psychokinetic energy. The French author Louis Jacolliot furthered the myth in *Les Fils de Dieu* (*The Sons of God*) (1873) and *Les Traditions indo-européennes* (*The Indo-European Traditions*) (1876). In these books, he linked vril with the subterranean people of Thule. The

Thuleans will harness the power of vril to become supermen and rule the world.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) also emphasized the concept of the Übermensch (superman) and began his final work, *Der Antichrist* (The Antichrist) (1895) with the line, "Let us see ourselves for what we are. We are Hyperboreans. We know well enough how we are living off that track." Although Nietzsche never mentioned vril, yet in his posthumously published collection of aphorisms, *Der Wille zur Macht* (The Will to Power), he emphasized the role of an internal force for superhuman development. He wrote that "the herd," meaning common persons, strives for security within itself through creating morality and rules, whereas the supermen have an internal vital force that drives them to go beyond the herd. That force necessitates and drives them to lie to the herd in order to remain independent and free from the "herd mentality."

In *The Arctic Home of the Vedas* (1903), the early advocate of Indian freedom, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, added a further touch by identifying the southern migration of the Thuleans with the origin of the Aryan race. Thus, many Germans in the early twentieth century believed that they were the descendants of the Aryans who had migrated south from Hyperborea-Thule and who were destined to become the master race of supermen through the power of vril. Hitler was among them.

The Thule Society and the Founding of the Nazi Party

Felix Niedner, the German translator of the Old Norse Eddas, founded the Thule Society in 1910. In 1918, Rudolf Freiherr von Sebottendorff established its Munich branch. Sebottendorff had previously lived for several years in Istanbul where, in 1910, he had formed a secret society that combined esoteric Sufism and Freemasonry. It believed in the creed of the assassins, deriving from the Nazari sect of Ismaili Islam, which had flourished during the Crusades. While in Istanbul, Sebottendorff was also undoubtedly familiar with the pan-Turanian (pan-Turkic) movement of the Young Turks, started in 1908, which was largely behind the Armenian genocide of 1915-1916. Turkey and Germany were allies during the First World War. Back in Germany, Sebottendorff had also been a member of the Germanen Order (Order of Teutons), founded in 1912 as a right-wing society with a secret anti-Semitic Lodge. Through these channels, assassination, genocide, and anti-Semitism became parts of the Thule Society's creed. Anti-Communism was added after the Bavarian Communist Revolution later in 1918, when the Munich Thule Society became the center of the counterrevolutionary movement.

In 1919, the Society spawned the German Workers Party. Starting later that year, Dietrich Eckart, a member of the inner circle of the Thule Society, initiated Hitler into the Society and began to train him in its methods for harnessing vril to create a race of Aryan supermen. Hitler had been mystic-minded from his youth, when he had studied the Occult and Theosophy in Vienna. Later, Hitler dedicated *Mein Kampf* to Eckart. In 1920, Hitler became the head of the German Workers Party, now renamed the National Socialist German Worker (Nazi) Party.

Haushofer, the Vril Society, and Geopolitics

Another major influence on Hitler's thinking was Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), a German military advisor to the Japanese after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Because he was extremely impressed with Japanese culture, many believe that he was responsible for the later German-Japanese alliance. He was also highly interested in Indian and Tibetan culture, learned Sanskrit, and claimed that he had visited Tibet.

After serving as a general in the First World War, Haushofer founded the Vril Society in Berlin

in 1918. It shared the same basic beliefs as the Thule Society and some say that it was its inner circle. The Society sought contact with supernatural beings beneath the earth to gain from them the powers of vril. It also asserted a Central Asian origin of the Aryan race. Haushofer developed the doctrine of Geopolitics and, in the early 1920s, became the director of the Institute for Geopolitics at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich. Geopolitics advocated conquering territory to gain more living space (Germ. Lebensraum) as a means of acquiring power.

Rudolf Hess was one of Haushofer's closest students and introduced him to Hitler in 1923, while Hitler was in prison for his failed Putsch. Subsequently, Haushofer often visited the future Führer, teaching him Geopolitics in association with the ideas of the Thule and Vril Societies. Thus, when Hitler became chancellor in 1933, he adopted Geopolitics as his policy for the Aryan race to conquer Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia. The key to success would be finding the forefathers of the Aryan race in Central Asia, the guardians of the secrets of vril.

The Swastika

The swastika is an ancient Indian symbol of immutable good luck. "Swastika" is an Anglicization of the Sanskrit word svastika, which means well-being or good luck. Used by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains for thousands of years, it became widespread in Tibet as well.

The swastika has also appeared in most other ancient cultures of the world. For example, the counterclockwise variant of it, adopted by the Nazis, is also the letter "G" in the medieval Northern European Runic Script. The Freemasons took the letter as an important symbol, since "G" could stand for God, the Great Architect of the Universe, or Geometry.

The swastika is also a traditional symbol of the Old Norse God of Thunder and Might (Scandinavian Thor, German Donner, Baltic Perkunas). Because of this association with the God of Thunder, the Latvians and Finnish both took the swastika as the insignia for their air forces when they gained independence after the First World War.

In the late nineteenth century, Guido von List adopted the swastika as an emblem for the Neo-Pagan movement in Germany. The Germans did not use the Sanskrit word swastika, however, but called it instead "Hakenkreutz," meaning "hooked cross." It would defeat and replace the cross, just as Neo-Paganism would defeat and replace Christianity.

Sharing the anti-Christian sentiment of the Neo-Pagan movement, the Thule Society also adopted the Hakenkreutz as part of its emblem, placing it in a circle with a vertical German dagger superimposed on it. In 1920, at the suggestion of Dr. Friedrich Krohn of the Thule Society, Hitler adopted the Hakenkreutz in a white circle for the central design of the Nazi Party flag. Hitler chose red for the background color to compete against the red flag of the rival Communist Party.

The French researchers Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, in *Le Matin des Magiciens* (The Morning of the Magicians) (1962), wrote that Haushofer convinced Hitler to use the Hakenkreuz as the symbol for the Nazi Party. They postulate that this was due to Haushofer's interest in Indian and Tibetan culture. This conclusion is highly unlikely, since Haushofer did not meet Hitler until 1923, whereas the Nazi flag first appeared in 1920. It is more likely that Haushofer used the widespread presence of the swastika in India and Tibet as evidence to convince Hitler of this region as the location of the forefathers of the Aryan race.

Nazi Suppression of Rival Occult Groups

During the first half of the 1920s, a violent rivalry took place among the Occult Societies and Secret Lodges in Germany. In 1925, for example, Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the Anthroposophical movement, was found murdered. Many suspected that the Thule Society had ordered his assassination. In later years, Hitler continued the persecution of Anthroposophists, Theosophists, Freemasons, and Rosicrucians. Various scholars ascribe this policy to Hitler's wish to eliminate any occult rivals to his rule.

Influenced by Nietzsche's writings and Thule Society creeds, Hitler believed that Christianity was a defective religion, infected by its roots in Jewish thinking. He viewed its teachings of forgiveness, the triumph of the weak, and self-abnegation as anti-evolutionary and saw himself as a messiah replacing God and Christ. Steiner had used the image of the Antichrist and Lucifer as future spiritual leaders who would regenerate Christianity in a new pure form. Hitler went much further. He saw himself as ridding the world of a degenerate system and bringing about a new step in evolution with the Aryan master race. He could tolerate no rival Antichrists, either now or in the future. He was tolerant, however, of Buddhism.

Buddhism in Nazi Germany

In 1924, Paul Dahlke founded the Buddhistischen Haus (House for Buddhists) in Frohnau, Berlin. It was open to members of all Buddhist traditions, but primarily catered to the Theravada and Japanese forms, since they were the most widely known in the West at that time. In 1933, it hosted the First European Buddhist Congress. The Nazis allowed the House for Buddhists to remain open throughout the war, but tightly controlled it. As some members knew Chinese and Japanese, they acted as translators for the government in return for tolerance of Buddhism.

Although the Nazi regime closed the Buddhistische Gemeinde (Buddhist Society) in Berlin, which had been active from 1936, and briefly arrested its founder Martin Steinke in 1941, they generally did not persecute Buddhists. After his release, Steinke and several others continued to lecture on Buddhism in Berlin. There is no evidence, however, that teachers of Tibetan Buddhism were ever present in the Third Reich.

The Nazi policy of tolerance for Buddhism does not prove any influence of Buddhist teachings on Hitler or Nazi ideology. A more probable explanation is Germany's wish not to damage relations with its Buddhist ally, Japan.

The Ahnenerbe

Under the influence of Haushofer, Hitler authorized Frederick Hielscher, in 1935, to establish the Ahnenerbe (Bureau for the Study of Ancestral Heritage), with Colonel Wolfram von Sievers as its head. Among other functions, Hitler charged it with researching Germanic runes and the origins of the swastika, and locating the source of the Aryan race. Tibet was the most promising candidate.

Alexander Csoma de Körös (Körösi Csoma Sandor) (1784-1842) was a Hungarian scholar obsessed with the quest to find the origins of the Hungarian people. Based on the linguistic affinities between Hungarian and the Turkic languages, he felt that the origins of the Hungarian people were in "the land of the Yugurs (Uighurs)" in East Turkistan (Xinjiang, Sinkiang). He believed that if he could reach Lhasa, he would find there the keys for locating his homeland.

Hungarian, Finnish, the Turkic languages, Mongolian, and Manchu belong to the Ural-Altaic family of languages, also known as the Turanian family, after the Persian word Turan for Turkestan. From 1909, the Turks had a pan-Turanian movement spearheaded by a society known as the Young Turks. The Hungarian Turanian Society soon followed in 1910 and the Turanian Alliance of Hungary in 1920. Some scholars believe that the Japanese and Korean languages also belong to the Turanian family. Thus, the Turanian National Alliance was founded in Japan in 1921 and the Japanese Turanian Society in the early 1930s. Haushofer was undoubtedly aware of these movements, which sought the origins of the Turanian race in Central Asia. It fit in well with the Thule Society's search for the origins of the Aryan race there as well. His interest in Tibetan culture added weight to the candidacy of Tibet as the key to finding a common origin for the Aryan and Turanian races and for gaining the power of *vril* that its spiritual leaders possessed.

Haushofer was not the only influence on the Ahnenerbe's interest in Tibet. Hielscher was a friend of Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer who had led expeditions to Tibet in 1893, 1899-1902, and 1905-1908, and an expedition to Mongolia in 1927-1930. A favorite of the Nazis, Hitler invited him to give the opening address at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Hedin engaged in pro-Nazi publishing activities in Sweden and made numerous diplomatic missions to Germany between 1939 and 1943.

In 1937, Himmler made the Ahnenerbe an official organization attached to the SS (Germ. Schutzstaffel, Protection Squad) and appointed Professor Walther Wüst, chairman of the Sanskrit Department at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, as its new director. The Ahnenerbe had a Tibet Institut (Tibet Institute), which was renamed the Sven Hedin Institut für Innerasien und Expeditionen (Sven Hedin Institute for Inner Asia and Expeditions) in 1943.

The Nazi Expedition to Tibet

Ernst Schäffer, a German hunter and biologist, participated in two expeditions to Tibet, in 1931-1932 and 1934-1936, for sport and zoological research. The Ahnenerbe sponsored him to lead a third expedition (1938-1939) at the official invitation of the Tibetan Government. The visit coincided with renewed Tibetan contacts with Japan. A possible explanation for the invitation is that the Tibetan Government wished to maintain cordial relations with the Japanese and their German allies as a balance against the British and Chinese. Thus, the Tibetan Government welcomed the German expedition at the 1939 New Year (Losar) celebration in Lhasa.

In *Fest der weissen Schleier: Eine Forscherfahrt durch Tibet nach Lhasa, der heiligen Stadt des Gottkönigtums* (Festival of the White Gauze Scarves: A Research Expedition through Tibet to Lhasa, the Holy City of the God Realm) (1950), Ernst Schäffer described his experiences during the expedition. During the festivities, he reported, the Nechung Oracle warned that although the Germans brought sweet presents and words, Tibet must be careful: Germany's leader is like a dragon. Tsarong, the pro-Japanese former head of the Tibetan military, tried to soften the prediction. He said that the Regent had heard much more from the Oracle, but he himself was unauthorized to divulge the details. The Regent prays daily for no war between the British and the Germans, since this would have terrible consequences for Tibet as well. Both countries must understand that all good people must pray the same. During the rest of his stay in Lhasa, Schäffer met often with the Regent and had a good rapport.

The Germans were highly interested in establishing friendly relations with Tibet. Their agenda, however, was slightly different from that of the Tibetans. One of the members of the Schäffer expedition was the anthropologist Bruno Beger, who was responsible for racial research. Having worked with H. F. K. Günther on *Die nordische Rasse bei den Indogermanen Asiens* (The Northern

Race among the Indo-Germans of Asia), Beger subscribed to Günther's theory of a "northern race" in Central Asia and Tibet. In 1937, he had proposed a research project for Eastern Tibet and, with the Schäffer expedition, planned to investigate scientifically the racial characteristics of the Tibetan people. While in Tibet and Sikkim on the way, Beger measured the skulls of three hundred Tibetans and Sikkimese and examined some of their other physical features and bodily marks. He concluded that the Tibetans occupied an intermediary position between the Mongol and European races, with the European racial element showing itself most pronouncedly among the aristocracy.

According to Richard Greve, "Tibetforschung in SS-Ahnenerbe (Tibetan Research in the SS-Ahnenerbe)" published in T. Hauschild (ed.) "Lebenslust und Fremdenfurcht" – Ethnologie im Dritten Reich ("Passion for Life and Xenophobia" – Ethnology in the Third Reich) (1995), Beger recommended that the Tibetans could play an important role after the final victory of the Third Reich. They could serve as an allied race in a pan-Mongol confederation under the aegis of Germany and Japan. Although Beger also recommended further studies to measure all the Tibetans, no further expeditions to Tibet were undertaken.

Purported Occult Expeditions to Tibet

Several postwar studies on Nazism and the Occult, such as Trevor Ravenscroft in *The Spear of Destiny* (1973), have asserted that under the influence of Haushofer and the Thule Society, Germany sent annual expeditions to Tibet from 1926 to 1943. Their mission was first to find and then to maintain contact with the Aryan forefathers in Shambhala and Agharti, hidden subterranean cities beneath the Himalayas. Adepts there were the guardians of secret occult powers, especially vril, and the missions sought their aid in harnessing those powers for creating an Aryan master race. According to these accounts, Shambhala refused any assistance, but Agharti agreed. Subsequently, from 1929, groups of Tibetans purportedly came to Germany and started lodges known as the Society of Green Men. In connection with the Green Dragon Society in Japan, through the intermediary of Haushofer, they supposedly helped the Nazi cause with their occult powers. Himmler was attracted to these groups of Tibetan-Agharti adepts and, purportedly from their influence, established the Ahnenerbe in 1935.

Aside from the fact that Himmler did not establish the Ahnenerbe, but rather incorporated it into the SS in 1937, Ravenscroft's account contains other dubious assertions. The main one is the purported Agharti support of the Nazi cause. In 1922, the Polish scientist Ferdinand Ossendowski published *Beasts, Men and Gods* describing his travels through Mongolia. In it, he related hearing of the subterranean land of Agharti beneath the Gobi Desert. In the future, its powerful inhabitants would come to the surface to save the world from disaster. The German translation of Ossendowski's book, *Tiere, Menschen und Götter*, appeared in 1923 and became quite popular. Sven Hedin, however, published in 1925 *Ossendowski und die Wahrheit* (Ossendowski and the Truth), in which he debunked the Polish scientist's claims. He pointed out that Ossendowski had lifted the idea of Agharti from Saint-Yves d'Alveidre's 1886 novel *Mission de l'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in Europe) to make his story more appealing to the German public. Since Hedin had a strong influence on the Ahnenerbe, it is unlikely that this bureau would have sent an expedition specifically to find Shambhala and Agharti and, subsequently, would have received assistance from the latter.